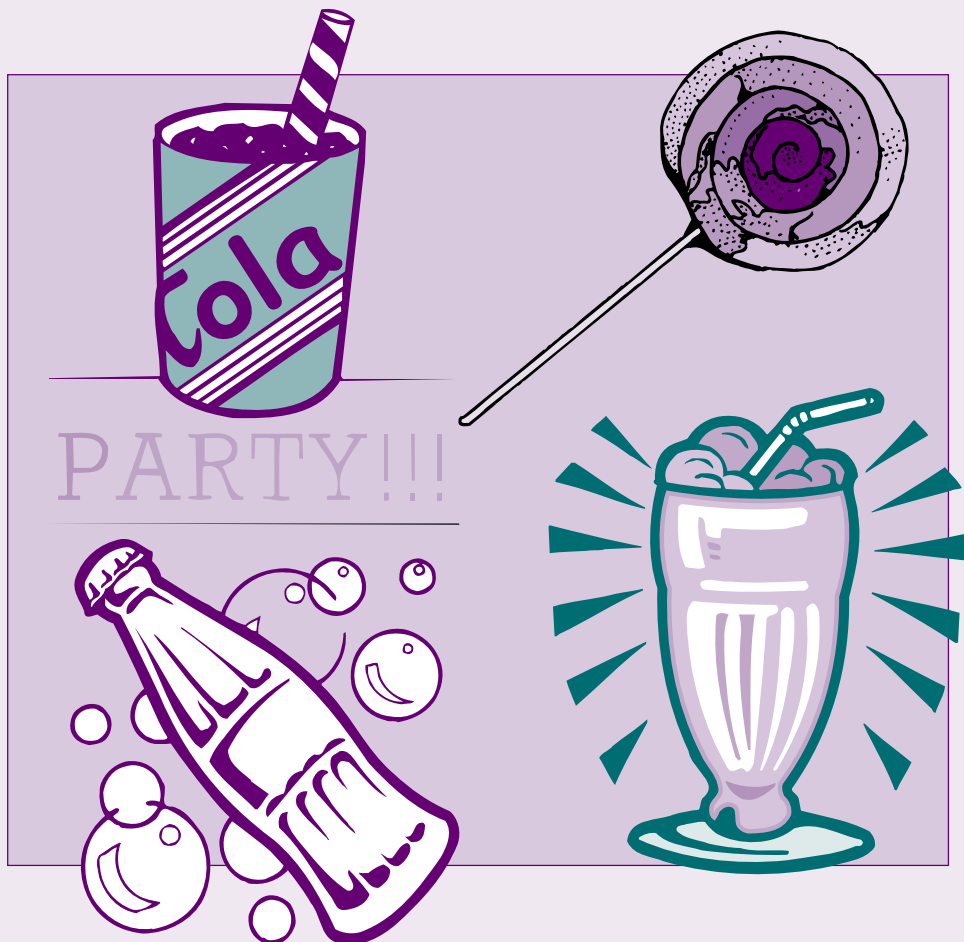


NEWS *Child Nutrition*

SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE EDITION

November, 2002 / Vol. 2, No. 5

Beyond the Cafeteria



Think about it...

- Where is food available in your school, other than the cafeteria?
- Does the food in all these places reflect healthy food choices for the students?

Maybe it's time to consider a comprehensive school nutrition policy!

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► From the Director's Desk

Choosing to Be the Solution

A widely quoted slogan from the 1960's declared "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem." I thought of this phrase during a recent conversation with a school administrator about the problem of soda machines in his school. There were many competing interests involved in the controversy, as well as strongly held beliefs – and some practical considerations, too. Opinions in this school community ranged from "We aren't the nutrition police!" to "This is a good way to raise money without having to go to the voters!" to "How can we care so little for our children's health?"

In order to create a healthy school nutrition environment it is necessary to take into account the foods sold and served throughout the school as well as the messages – the overt ones and the unintended ones – that students receive from the decisions and actions of adults. The school food service program has a large role to play in modeling healthy meals, serving appealing and nutritious foods, and providing a daily nutrition education laboratory where students practice healthy eating behaviors. But the food service program is only one component of the nutrition environment. Vending machines, school stores, classroom parties, and fund raising are part of the nutrition environment as well.

What advice did I give to the beleaguered administrator? Fortunately, there were answers to be found in the past several issues of this newsletter:

- 1. Taking the time to develop a comprehensive school nutrition policy.** This will ensure that the school board and the school community have an opportunity to consider – and perhaps debate – the values they have in regards to nutrition, student health and the role of the school in promoting healthy eating habits. With the policy in place, decisions about specific choices (soda/no soda, for example) are much clearer.
- 2. Finding allies.** The food service director or manager, the principal, the school nurse may each have an interest in what foods are sold and served in the school. As individuals they may have a hard time making a difference. However, working together with a nutrition advisory council, a school health council, or a similar group, they can improve the chances for successful and meaningful changes.
- 3. Making nutrition education a priority.** Nutrition education is a vital role for the school food service program, for educators, and for parents. Nutrition education needs to include both the cognitive information that students can use AND the opportunity for daily practice to make the nutrition information a part of their lives. For example, students need to know why healthy snacks are important and what constitutes a healthy snack. But they also need to have healthy snack choices available when they stop by the vending machines after school.

With the news all around us indicating that Americans – both children and adults – are facing long term health problems because of increased rates of obesity, diabetes and hypertension, caring adults must begin to tackle the hard choices that can lead to a solution.

– Jo Busha, *State Director*

➤ *Focus on the Nutrition Environment*

School food service programs are frequently the target of criticism when concerns arise about the nutrient intake of students. However, the cafeteria is not the only place that students eat food or are exposed to food during an “average” day. Think for a moment about fundraisers that involve food, such as candy sales, bake sales, and food items sold at school stores. And what about the omnipresent beverage and snack machines in most high schools, many middle schools, and even some elementary schools? Then there are the classroom pizza parties and birthday celebrations. Even when the school cafeteria offers a variety of nutritious meal choices and limits “junk food” a la carte items, the competition for students’ money and loyalty is often intense. This dichotomy of purpose is often not given much thought in the total school picture. To the degree that students have limited access to nutritious food choices throughout the school day and at school activities, their opportunities for making healthy choices and consuming healthy foods are also limited.



The Competition

Decisions about the sale of food outside the cafeteria, the use of food as a reward or a potential fundraiser, or the sale of a la carte items in the cafeteria are often made without consideration to the overall effect on children’s nutrient intake. Typically these foods are high in fat and/or sugar and are of low nutrient value. When these foods are available to the exclusion of healthier options, students are denied the opportunity to practice what they have learned in the classroom about making healthy choices. It also sends a powerful message about acceptable dietary behavior.

Limitations of Federal Regulations. The federal government has established standards that require schools to provide meals that reflect and support the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. However,

Foods of minimal nutritional value

include those that provide less than five percent of the U.S. recommended daily allowance per serving for protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, niacin, riboflavin, thiamin, calcium, and iron. These “foods” are classified into four categories:

- ✓ Carbonated soft drinks
- ✓ Chewing gum
- ✓ Water ices
- ✓ Certain candies made predominantly from sweeteners, such as hard candy, licorice, jelly beans, and gum drops



these standards do not apply to foods sold outside the school meals programs. In fact the only regulation governing competitive foods (or foods that compete with breakfast, lunch, or after school snack programs) prohibit the sale of foods of minimal nutritional value in food service areas during mealtime.

This means that foods of minimal nutritional value can be sold in the cafeteria before and after school meal periods and also allows the sale of these foods outside the cafeteria any time during the school day. In addition, there are no regulations covering the sale of common snack foods such as chips, most candy bars, and noncarbonated, high-sugar beverages.

Vending machines. Vending machines are not inherently “bad.” They can provide access to food when the cafeteria is closed, such as before after-school activities start or when there are school activities on the weekend. Unfortunately, the most common types of food offered in vending machines are soft drinks, chips, desserts, and candy because these foods have a good profit margin and are a good source of income to schools. In fact, many schools depend on these funds to help defray the cost of extracurricular activities or even support classroom activities and equipment.

Exclusive Beverage Contracts. An even more lucrative option for schools is signing a contract with a bottling company giving that company exclusive rights over the beverages sold in school vending machines, in the school store, and at school sponsored events. Often these contracts include incentives that link sales volume to revenue the company may pay to the schools. Granted, the extra revenue is enticing in these times of increased educational costs and limited state and local funds. However, placement of vending machines in convenient locations or limiting the sale of other foods during school and at school-related events ultimately encourages students to purchase more soda. And increased consumption of soda can have a negative effect on children's and teens' nutritional status.

Another drawback of exclusive beverage contracts is the common practice of the bottling company providing funding for a major purchase at the school, but requiring that their logo and/or brand name be on that item. An example is a basketball scoreboard with the brand name of a carbonated beverage on it. The tradeoff for getting the scoreboard is providing advertising space for that product. Students and others who are in the gym for any purpose are exposed to it. And companies know that brand loyalty can start at an early age.

A La Carte Sales. When food service programs are perceived to be an entity separate from the school and the school board and administration expects the program to be completely self-supporting, it places a lot of pressure on the food service managers and staff to increase revenue. One way that school food service programs do this is by selling foods and beverages a la carte. Common a la carte items at elementary schools are ice cream, crackers, and cookies. Selections in middle school are usually greater and may include chips and sugar-laden drinks, and many high schools offer even a wider variety of foods. In some schools the way the a la carte program is managed results in competition for the school meals programs!

Many food service managers feel they are between a rock and a hard place when it comes to a la carte. On one hand, items of low nutrient value often have a higher profit margin than items with greater nutrient value. On the other hand, the administration school board expects the food

service program to be self-supporting. The end result is that for some school food service programs, a la carte sales are the means to keep the program in the black or earn enough money for equipment repair or replacement.

Classroom and School Activities. Competition between classes on fund-raising projects, a class reaching a specific goal, or just a special occasion can result in a food "reward," which is often pizza, ice cream, and/or cookies or cake. A fund-raising activity might involve the sale of pizza, ice cream sundaes, cookies, or candy. The bottom line is that these activities compete with the food service program resulting in increased consumption of foods generally high in fat and/or sugar and decreased revenue for the food service program.



Leveling the Playing Field

Probably no one would deny that good nutrition is important for children and teens. And since there are no federal regulations to support good nutrition outside the cafeteria, many states and school districts have taken it upon themselves to align their actions with their beliefs. They have taken a long, hard look at the big picture and established regulations that offer some balance in food choices available to students both in the cafeteria and elsewhere in the school.

Local and state actions. In West Virginia the state board of education prohibits soft drinks at elementary and middle schools. Also prohibited are the sale or serving of:

- ✓ Chewing gum, flavored ice bars, and candy bars
- ✓ Food or drinks containing 40 percent or more, by weight, of sugar or other sweeteners
- ✓ Juice or juice products containing less than 20 percent real fruit or vegetable juice
- ✓ Foods with more than eight grams of fat per one ounce serving

California has requirements for food items offered for sale on school grounds by any entity or

organization. There are also limits on the number of times a month student organizations can sell food items. In Los Angeles, the school board recently voted unanimously to ban soft drinks in all schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District beginning in January of 2004.

Options for vending machines. Throughout the country schools/districts have taken steps to limit access to vending machines that feature low nutrient food. Some examples are:

- ✓ Keeping these vending machines turned off during regular school hours.
- ✓ Keeping these machines off until the end of the last lunch period.
- ✓ Keeping these machines off until 30 minutes after the end of the last lunch period.
- ✓ Prohibiting the sale of carbonated soft drinks until the end of the school day.
- ✓ Placing vending machines featuring low nutrient food in out-of-the-way locations.

Another option is to have vending machines that offer healthy food and beverage choices. These may be the only type of vending machines, or they may be placed in high-traffic areas, while machines with not-so-healthy food are placed inconveniently. Milk vending machines have been introduced in a number of schools and have turned out to be quite popular with students. When milk is available, many students will choose it over soda if that also is available. Other healthy choices can be stocked in vending machines. Suggestions by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention appear in the box on this page.

Exclusive contracts. If schools are considering exclusive beverage and/or food vending contracts, they need to look closely at the terms of the agreement. Anticipating the consequences of signing the contract can help with the decision. Some points to look for (or require) in a contract include:

- No financial incentive for students' increased consumption of food or beverages with little nutritional value
- A minimum percentage (such as at least 50%) of beverage products offered must be bottled water or 100% fruit juice
- Soft drink container sizes are moderate
- Prices of nutritious offerings are no more expensive than the less nutritious offerings

Healthy Choices for Vending Machines

- ✓ Canned and fresh fruit
- ✓ Fresh vegetables
- ✓ Fruit and vegetable juices
- ✓ Low-fat crackers and cookies
- ✓ Pretzels
- ✓ Bread products
- ✓ Ready to eat low sugar cereals
- ✓ Granola bars made with unsaturated fat
- ✓ Low fat or skim milk
- ✓ Low fat or nonfat yogurt
- ✓ Snack mixes of cereal and dried fruit with a small amount of nuts and seeds
- ✓ Raisins and other dried fruit
- ✓ Peanut butter and low fat crackers.



- The vendor helps sponsor promotional materials and events to encourage healthy food choices

The school food service program. Some schools have revamped their school meals programs to improve the nutritional quality of meals as well as to increase participation. One tactic is to involve students and staff in discussions with food service staff regarding changes to make meals more appealing to more students and more easily accessible. When students are involved in the problem solving and implementation of new ideas, they can be a big asset “selling” the changes to other students.

Another route schools may take is to rethink the a la carte program. For example, some high schools sell main dish items (such as sandwiches and pizza slices) as a la carte items. Incorporating these foods into a reimbursable meal has the potential to improve individual nutrient intake as well as increase participation. Ideally what is lost in a la carte sales is recouped by the increased

reimbursement due to increased participation in the program.

Some studies have shown that students' selection of healthier items both in vending machines and on the a la carte line increase when prices are lowered. Price reductions in these selections can be offset by increasing the price of the less healthy alternatives.

Classroom activities, school activities, and fundraisers. Some schools have established standards that guide the food selections for classroom activities. Guidelines that suggest appropriate foods for children to bring in for sharing with the entire class can help prevent cakes and cookies or other sweets from being the only offering.

California has developed a nutritious foods list and requires that half of all food items offered for sale by any organization or entity at any location on the school premises must come from the list. The list includes dairy products, juices of at least 50 percent full strength, fruits, vegetables, nuts, grain products, meats, legumes, and any food that would qualify as one of the required food components of the school lunch meal pattern. California also sets limits on the number of times student organizations can sell food items on campus and on the number of different types of food items they can sell.

Organizations that are planning fundraising drives can be encouraged to consider healthy food options. For example, one school in Vermont sells cases of Florida oranges and grapefruit each year to raise money for the ski club. There are also a variety of alternative items that can be sold instead of food or beverages, such as gift wrap, flowers, greeting cards, or items with the school logo.

Promoting healthy choices

Policies about food. Developing school policies that promote healthy eating requires that all school-related activities involving food be identified and evaluated. It may be an eye-opener when people see an all-encompassing list! Some areas that a policy might cover are:

- ✓ Food choices whenever food is sold or offered at school, such as vending machines, a la carte sales, fundraising activities, parties, celebrations, meetings

- ✓ Nutrition education
- ✓ Hours when vending machines that offer high fat/high sugar items can operate and food-related fundraisers can take place
- ✓ Frequency of food-related fundraisers
- ✓ Commercial advertising

Keep in mind that the intent of standards and policies should not be to prohibit food that has little or no nutritional value, but to educate students about nutrition and healthy eating, and to provide choices so they can practice what they learn.

Making changes at the school or district level cannot happen overnight. And it requires a broad base of support — parents, teachers, school administrators, and students. Individuals and groups in the community may also be helpful. The information on Action Planning in the April 2002 Issue of this newsletter can be used to initiate change.



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► Administrative Update

CNPweb

You know all those forms we mail to you, and you have to fill out and mail back to us, and we have to call you if the form is incomplete or we can't read your writing? Well, just wait until next year!

It is with great anticipation that we await the implementation of the Child Nutrition Program Electronic Application and Reimbursement System, or **CNPweb** as we will commonly refer to it. If all goes according to plan, starting with the 2003-04 school year, school food authorities will submit the following information via the web:

- Yearly renewal of participation in the breakfast, lunch, and/or afterschool snack program
- Yearly report of enrollment and free and reduced numbers
- Monthly claim for reimbursement
- Yearly financial statement

Just think—no more worries about the postmark date or whether the form got lost in the mail. Once the information is submitted electronically, its receipt is confirmed electronically. No muss, no fuss, no last-minute trips to the post office.

By the time you receive this newsletter a demonstration of **CNPweb** will have been given at the Annual School Nutrition Conference in Killington on October 24. If you attended, you will know what we are talking about. If you didn't attend, but know someone who did, ask him or her about it. We hope you are all as excited about it as we are! Stay tuned for more information and the times and locations of training sessions.

There does not have to be a dedicated computer located in the food service area to use **CNPweb**. However, there needs to be a computer with internet capability that is accessible to food service in order for the necessary records to be filed. It is recommended that access of the system be through the use of an IBM compatible personal computer that uses Microsoft Windows 9X, ME NT or XP operating system with a minimum resolution of 800 x 600. The recommended browser is Internet Explorer version 4.0 or greater, or Netscape Navi-

gator version 4.5 or greater. Use of any other browser will not be supported. For user access via modem, a 56K or faster connection is recommended.

Food Safety Issues

Foodborne Disease in Schools. According to an article in the September 25, 2002 edition of *School Nutrition Professional*, schools in the United States experience about 25 outbreaks of foodborne disease a year. These figures were based on state and local health department records of foodborne disease outbreaks between 1973 and 1997.

Salmonella was the most commonly identified pathogen, accounting for 36 percent of the outbreaks. The foods most commonly implicated were poultry, salads, Mexican-style food, beef, and dairy products (excluding ice cream). The causes? Most likely improper food storage and holding temperatures and food contaminated by a food handler.

To prevent foodborne disease in your programs, remember:

- **Clean:** Wash hands and surfaces often. Wash fresh fruits and vegetables before preparing.
- **Separate:** Don't cross-contaminate
- **Cook:** Cook to proper temperatures. Hold hot foods at 140° or above.
- **Chill:** Refrigerate perishables, prepared food, and leftovers within 2 hours at or below 40°.



Sprouts. In the past few years, there have been several reported foodborne illness outbreaks associated with raw and lightly cooked alfalfa and mung bean sprouts. These outbreaks involved the pathogenic bacteria *Salmonella* or *E. coli*. To reduce the risk of illness:

- Cook all sprouts thoroughly before eating.
- In restaurants avoid taking sprouts at salad bars and request that raw sprouts not be added to your food.
- In the school cafeteria, remove sprouts from salad bars or other food items.
- Avoid using home-grown sprouts. Some of the illness outbreaks have been traced to contaminated seeds. If pathogenic bacteria are present in or on seed, they can grow to high levels during sprouting even under clean conditions.

Child Nutrition Program Review

If you are wondering whether your school will be one of the schools that undergo a review this year, here's how you can tell. If you did **not** receive an announcement for the workshop, "Preparing for a Child Nutrition Program Review," you will not be reviewed this year. The workshop announcement was mailed out in September. Along those same lines, if you did not get a workshop announcement for "Nutrient Analysis Training," your menus will not undergo a nutrient analysis this year. Those announcements were also mailed in September.

And while we are on the subject of reviews, here's some information for those of you who are a bit hazy about the difference between a "Child Nutrition Program Review" and a "Nutrient Analysis."

- **Child Nutrition Program Review:**
A comprehensive review to evaluate compliance with federal regulations and improve Program operations, quality, and financial status.
- **Nutrient Analysis:** A focused activity to analyze the nutrient content of a week's menus to evaluate compliance with nutrient standards and Dietary Guidelines.

Reversing the Trends:

Improving the Nutrition Environment in Your Middle and High School

We hope all of you who work in middle and high school settings have marked December 12 on your calendar and started recruiting team members to attend this important conference. The ideal team would include the principal, food service manager, health educator, family and consumer science teacher, school nurse, a student, and a community member. This conference will help you work together to assess the nutrition environment in your school, learn how food service programs in other states have addressed the issue of the school nutrition environment, and explore how teens can be an integral part of improving the nutrition environment. In addition, an announcement will be made about how your school can get grant funds to take action on implementing your team's ideas for improving the nutrition environment.



► Frequently Asked Questions

Since it is November, the verification process should be under way at all schools that take applications for free and reduced price school meals. So here are some commonly asked questions about this process. If you, the reader, is not the one who conducts verification, please pass this information along to that person.

Q *I'm confused. I'm doing a random selection for verification purposes and I thought I was supposed to calculate 3 percent of the applications, but a friend who works in the next district told me that I had to verify 3 percent of the students on my master list. Which is it?*

A This is a common area of confusion. When doing a random selection, you first separate out all the direct certification letters. These are the letters from PATH that were sent directly to Supervisory Unions or that parents may have turned in. Then you count the number of applications (i.e. pieces of paper) that are left and calculate 3 percent of this number. An example is if you have 150 applications, you have to verify 3 percent, which equals 5 applications. You might have one child on each application or there might be 5 children on one application, two on another, and one on each of the rest, with the result that there will be 10 children involved. But you calculated your 3 percent on the basis of applications, not students. (Don't rub it in with your friend, but you were right on this one.)

Q *This year I have 137 applications for random sampling. I calculated that 3% of 137 equaled 4.11 so I rounded the number down to 4. My friend in the next district says I'm supposed to round it up to 5. What are the rules on this?*

A This time your friend is right. When your calculation of 3% of the applications comes out to a decimal point, the number is always rounded up to the next whole number. Even if the decimal is less than .5, you must round up.

Q *Is it true that I don't count the food stamp letters in my total number of applications to verify?*

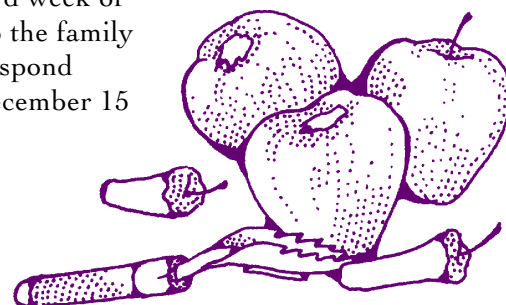
A Yes. Direct certification letters, those letters from the food stamp office or PATH, are already verified directly by the PATH office. If you do not have a separate file of direct certification letters, remove them from the other applications and calculate your 3% based on the total number of applications remaining. These would be the ones that had to be approved: those that include income information and household members, those whose families reported either a Reach Up case number or Food Stamp number, and applications for foster children.

Q *Is it true that if a family is eligible for Dr. Dynasaur they are also eligible for and probably getting food stamps?*

A No. The income guidelines for Dr. Dynasaur benefits are higher than those for food stamp benefits. The family must provide either a food stamp number, a Reach Up case number, or family member and income information.

Q *What if I send out the notification, but don't hear back from someone?*

A There is no requirement that you send a reminder, but in the interest of public relations, most schools do a follow-up letter, reminding the family of their obligation if their child or children are to continue to receive free or reduced price meal benefits. This should be done in the second or third week of November, so the family has time to respond before the December 15 deadline.



Q *Should I send a family another reminder if I don't hear from them by December 15?*

A No. Once the original deadline (December 15) has passed, you must write a letter telling the family that their child or children will become ineligible for free or reduced price meal benefits 10 days from the date of your letter. They have the right to appeal. A sample letter notifying parents of the outcome of the verification can be found in the Verification Manual.

Q *If a family's income is verified to be what was reported on the application form, do I have to let them know their child(ren)'s status did not change?*

A Yes. All families that were "verified" should be notified of the outcome. Use the sample letter that is in the Verification Manual as the basis for your letter.

Q *What do I do if a family did not submit documentation of income for the verification process, then submits a new application after the 10 day appeal period is up?*

A In this situation, the application cannot be approved without documentation of income (i.e. they must complete the verification process). Once they provide income information and have been determined to be eligible, then you can approve the child(ren) for free or reduced price meals.

Q *We have two families whose applications seem to contain questionable income information. I don't believe they would actually be eligible for free if they reported correct information. Can I choose these applications for verification?*

A Yes, you may choose these applications for verification. However, you must also choose the 3% random sample in addition to those two applications.

Q *In my random sampling of applications, I chose one that the principal had completed for a family using collateral contacts for the income information. How do I verify this form?*

A This application is already verified to the extent that it can be. Eliminate it from the applications that will be used for random sampling.

Q *In my random sampling, a form completed by an emancipated student was chosen. This student is 17 years old and is living with his friend's parents temporarily. How do I verify his application?*

A If an emancipated student reported income, then he/she must provide documentation of that income. If zero income was reported, then check with the student to see if his/her situation has changed. Another way to verify an application by an emancipated student is to use a collateral contact.

Q *I completed verification by December 15th as required. Three of the families did not respond by the deadline and their benefits were terminated. Later in the month one family submitted verification information along with new applications. Another family did the same in early January. Since I received this information before the Verification Record was due, do I change my verification record? Or do I leave their outcomes as termination, which is what the case was on December 15?*

A You must report the results of the verification process as it was when you completed it on December 15th. At the point, the family had not responded and their benefits were terminated as required. This is the information that you report on the Verification Record.

Q *We had several families that did not respond to the request for verification information. My principal says not to worry about it and to just reinstate the families after December 15th. I don't think this is correct. What must I do?*

A These families cannot be reinstated unless they submit verification of their income and it is determined that their child(ren) are eligible based on that information. If they just wait a while and submit another eligibility application, they must provide verification information with that application, or the child(ren) remain ineligible.

► Bulletin Board

Reversing the Trends: Improving the Nutrition Environment in Your Middle and High School

December 12, 2002

At the Capitol Plaza in
Montpelier

Newsletter Insert

We frequently answer questions about foods that count toward meeting the meal pattern requirements and also about CN (Child Nutrition) Labels. The insert provides information about both these topics.

Visit our Web Site!

www.state.vt.us/educ/nutrition

Making Every Bite Count

Did you miss the opportunity to participate in the "Making Every Bite Count" sessions last year? Now is your chance! This series of 5, day-long nutrition-oriented sessions will be made available again this year, this time at the Holiday Inn in Rutland. See the "calendar" on the back of this newsletter for dates and times. Check your mail for more information and registration materials.

December 15

Don't forget that all verification activities should be completed by December 15. The deadline for parents/guardians getting the information back to the school should be far enough before December 15 to allow the process to be completed by that date. The form must be sent to Child Nutrition Programs by January 17. **If you are not the verification officer, please pass along this information to the appropriate person.**



Another Reminder...

At least one on-site monitoring visit is required each year:

- at all schools with meals programs operated by a Food Service Management Company (a school official must do the monitoring)
- at all schools with more than one school in the School Food Authority

The form to use is available on our web site or from Child Nutrition Programs. The deadline for completing the monitoring visits is February 1.

► Important Dates

**November 14, 2002; January 15, 2003;
March 12, 2003; April 15, 2003; May 6, 2003**

Making Every Bite Count

Rutland Holiday Inn

8:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Sponsored by VT Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs

Registration materials have been sent out. Must sign up for all five sessions.

December 3, 2001

Deadline for SFAs to submit Free and Reduced Report to Child Nutrition Programs

December 12, 2002

Reversing the Trends: Improving the Nutrition Environment in Your Middle and High School

8:30 – 3:30 p.m.

Capitol Plaza Hotel and Conference Center, Montpelier

Sponsored by VT Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs

Registration materials have been mailed

December 15, 2001

Deadline for completing verification activities. (Information and Manual mailed in early November.)

January 17, 2002

Deadline for submitting the completed Verification Record to Child Nutrition Programs

February 1, 2002

Deadline for completing monitoring for all schools that use a Food Service Management Company and/or SFAs with more than one site.

November 2002, Vol. 2, Issue 5

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Guidance, EST Coordinator*

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